

Cute as Can Be

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Summary: A bunch of cute, cuddly creatures cause trouble for the Pride Landers, and it's up to Simba and Nala to stop them...

Chapter 1: Chapter 1: Please Don't Leave Me

AN: I bet you all want to know what happened to Nala after the horrific events of the previous story. Well, let's just say that's she's become a little clingy after the whole incident with Hago...

Cute as Can Be

Chapter One: Please Don't Leave Me

"Simba... please don't go... I don't want to be on my own..."

Simba sighed, and turned around to look at Nala, who was clinging to his legs, a pleading, fearful look in her eyes. She looked so vulnerable and scared. Simba couldn't really blame her, considering what she'd been through. "Nala, I need to go. You'll be fine on your own for five minutes – *won't* you?"

Nala closed her eyes and shook her head. "No... I don't feel safe on my own... Please stay with me, Simba... I can't stand being alone." She whimpered, tightening her grip around Simba's legs. "*Please*."

Simba looked down at the ground, feeling so sorry for her. So, so sorry. Nala had been hurt. *Badly*. She'd been tortured horribly, and very nearly lost her mind. And for some reason, Simba felt like it was all his fault.

He couldn't help it. It was just that... he felt he had a certain responsibility to protect Nala from any kind of harm. And he'd failed. Failed to make her safe. Instead, now she was afraid to do anything. She couldn't even be left alone for much more than a minute. Her life had become a living hell.

Simba looked back at Nala, and smiled warmly. "You can come with me, if you want," he offered. "I was only going for a quick walk – to stretch my legs. I'm getting all achy just sitting around here doing nothing."

"Oh... I get it..." Nala dipped her head, a saddened expression on her face. "You don't want me around. You just... want to go on your own adventures."

"What?" Simba's eyes widened, and he shook his head. "Nala, you've got it all wrong. I don't—"

"It's okay, Simba," Nala told him, getting to her paws. "Really. I don't mind. I'll be... just... fine..."

"Nala..." Simba began softly, touching her on the shoulder and turning her around so she was facing him. "I *a*lways want you around. That's how it's always been, and how it's always *going* to be." He embraced her in a hug. "I'll be with you until you're well again. You *will* be well again. I know it."

"But I'm so scared, Simba," Nala confessed, returning the hug and nuzzling his warm chest. She blinked a few times, like trying to shake something off her face. Something that wouldn't go away...

But memories were hard to get rid of.

"It's just that... everytime I close my eyes I can't help but remember," Nala told him. "I see... that face. That horrible face. His eyes burning into mine." She flinched, as if the memories were physically *hurting* her. It *felt* like they were... "I can't stand it. I wish it never happened."

"It's okay, Nala," Simba assured her, stroking her back with his paw. "Hago's gone now. He's not going to hurt us ever again."

"Remember what happened last time," Nala reminded him bitterly. "He died, and then he came back. If he's done it before, then he can do it again. He won't ever stop until we're both dead."

"He's not going to come back," said Simba. "I know that for a fact."

Nala had a doubtful look on her face. "And what makes you think that?" she asked. "How can you be sure?"

"Because the nightmares stopped," Simba revealed, sounding quite happy about that fact. "It's been three days, and everytime I've had a happy dream. *Really* happy. Me, you; a lot of cute romance. It doesn't get any better. I think it's a sign. A sign that Hago is gone for good."

"Really?" Nala looked surprised. "Because for me, it's the total opposite," she told Simba, looking up at him worriedly.

"What do you mean?" Simba asked, sharing her worry.

"I keep having nightmares," Nala explained. "It's just that..." Her eyes widened in horror. "I killed him. I didn't mean to. I tried so hard to forget. Every night the dreams get stronger. He's there when I sleep. Whispering, *laughing*. Telling me I'm just the same as he is – we're both the same." She sobbed. "I'm sorry, Simba. It's all my fault. This wouldn't have happened if I'd listened to you about Hago coming back."

"Don't say things like that, Nala," said Simba. "It's not your fault. This wasn't supposed to happen. It's Hago's fault. And he's dead now. For good."

Nala sighed, lowering herself to the ground, so she lay on her back, staring up at the den ceiling. "What do I do?" she asked, sounding like she didn't have a hope. "He messed me up so much... I didn't know what I was thinking. And it *hurt*."

"I know, Nala," Simba said sympathetically. "I know. You just need to... rest up. Get your head together."

Nala nodded – although she didn't look any happier. "I can't make any sense out of it. How could he do that to me? His own daughter..."

Simba's eyes widened in surprise. "Daughter?" he exclaimed. "Nala, what do you mean by 'daughter'?"

"Didn't I say?" She sniffled, wiping a tear from her eye. "Hago was my father. My *real* father. He altered my mother's memory so she wouldn't remember him. I didn't even know until... Well, you know."

Simba looked completely shocked. "But... I don't understand. You don't look anything like Hago. And you don't act like him – *that's* for sure."

Nala shrugged in response. "I guess I take after my mother's side," she responded. "Something I'm actually grateful for. I wouldn't have wanted anything to do with that monster anyway. I'm *glad* he's dead."

Simba looked apologetic. "Nala... you know that I would have—"

"Switched places with me if you could," Nala finished for him. "I know, Simba. That's why I love you. You'd do anything for me. You're the kindest cub I've ever met."

"And the funniest," Simba added, tickling her on the stomach.

Nala giggled a little. "Simba... stop it... that tickles..."

Simba smiled in response. "A smile. Nice to see one from you," he remarked, the smile turning into a grin. "I think that's what you need. Something really nice to cheer you up. What do you think?"

"What did you have in mind?"

***Chapter 2*: Chapter 2: Plants and Other Green Things**

Chapter Two: Plants and Other Green Things

"Okay, buster, I'm only gonna say this once," said Haiba to the green plant that was in front of him. "'Cause I'm a very busy cub and I haven't got all day. Which one of your kind is the lion-eater?"

The plant said nothing. It just swayed lightly in the pleasant morning breeze of the Pride Lands, not a care in the world.

"Oh, don't give me that," Haiba said. "It's obvious that you've got the information I need. And if you're not gonna cooperate, then I'm going to have to take drastic action. In other words, I'm gonna pull you right out of your roots. Am I making myself clear?"

Again, nothing.

"That's it!" Haiba cried angrily, getting ready to pull the plant out of the ground and beat it senseless.

But before he could do anything, a familiar voice stopped him. "Haiba, what the heck are you doing?"

Haiba turned around to see Simba, and smiled. "Oh, hey, Simba," he greeted him. "I was just... interrogating these plants for information on... Well, I'll tell you when you're older." His eyes widened when he noticed that Nala stood next to Simba. "And... *Nala*? What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be in the den – *resting*?"

"Simba thought it would be a nice idea for me to get out a little bit," Nala explained with a smile. "And so far, I have to admit, I'm liking it. Especially watching you talking to plants."

"I have a way of words with nature," Haiba told her. "I can talk to plants... trees... water. My senses are finely tuned."

Simba made his way down the small hill he stood at the top of, and joined Haiba in the ditch below. It was filled with all different kinds of plants. Some long, some short; some wide, some thin. "Can't say I've been around here before," he said. "I'm not exactly into plants and other green things."

"Don't try picking your nose, then," Haiba quipped, grinning. "Anyway, if you'll excuse me, I've got to finish my investigation."

Simba gave him a funny look. "Yeah..." he said, walking across the ditch. "You do that. I'll just—"

Simba cried out as his leg slipped into some kind of hole in the ground. "Whoa!" he exclaimed, jumping away. "What was that?"

"Good question," replied Haiba, looking at the green plant Simba had just crushed when he slipped. "I think you've just killed that plant, though." Haiba walked over to the plant, and patted it softly. "There, there, little guy," he said to it. "You'll be safe in Plant Heaven."

"I can't tell whether he's serious or not," said Nala, as she cautiously made her way down the ditch, joining Simba by his side.

"I'm always serious," Haiba assured her, before tugging at the dead plant. "Huh?" It didn't budge. "What the...?" He pulled at it with all his strength, but it wouldn't come out of the ground. "This doesn't make sense at all!"

"Here, let me help," Simba offered, grabbing the other end of the plant. "One the count of three, we pull at it as hard as we can. Got it?"

Haiba nodded. "Got it."

"Okay." Simba tightened his grip. "One... two... three."

They both tugged at the plant, and slowly, it began to come loose from the ground, along with a good section of the earth. "Wow," Simba grunted, as he lifted the plant and the soil out of the ground, revealing a large crevice big enough for three cubs – like them – to go down. "Who knew that was under here?"

"It's certainly big," Nala commented, joining the two of them. "At least, big enough for cubs our size."

"What do you think's down there?" Haiba wondered, sticking his head down the crevice for a closer look. "All I can see is blackness. It's just really, *really* dark. It's like... when you close your eyes. That's pretty dark, but this is... *darker*. Do you

get what I'm saying?"

"Basically, it's not light," Simba concluded with a smile. "So it's dark. Very, very, very, very, very dark. Am I right?"

"You're not wrong," replied Haiba, grinning. "So – let's go down there."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa," Nala waved a paw in the air, shaking her head. "You can't just go hurling yourself down a dark hole in the ground. There could be monsters down there, or..." A worried look appeared on her face. "*Demons*."

"*Demons*?" Haiba raised an eyebrow at her. "Was that really the best you could come up with? I would have said devils... Evil devils. Evil devils with pointy horns. Evil devils with pointy horns and razor-sharp teeth." He nodded. "Yeah. That sounds okay."

"You're not making me any less nervous," Nala told him as she slowly backed away, fear creeping up on her very quickly. "You're not suckered in by this – are you, Simba?"

Simba was already halfway climbing into the crevice. "Sorry, what did you say, Nala?"

"Oh, you can't be serious!" Nala exclaimed. "Simba – our lives have already been endangered enough, and you're going to risk getting killed *again*? When do you ever stop?"

"Oh, it's probably just going to be a bunch of rocks or something." Simba brushed off her comments. "Nothing deadly at all. Either that or untold riches for all of us." An eager grin spread across his face. "I'm hoping for the last one!"

"Come on, Simba, let's just leave it for today," Nala said, a pleading look in her eyes. "Something bad is going to happen, and I just can't handle it right now. Please."

"Okay. You stay here, and me and Haiba will go in," Simba told her.

"But what if *you* get hurt, Simba?" Nala asked. "Or worse – what if you *die*? You don't know what's down there."

"It'll be fine," Simba assured her, not realising what the big deal was. "It's probably safer down there than it is up here. Look – one of those plants has thorns. One of those prickly things could get in your eye and..." He trailed off, before noticing the expression on Nala's face. "Sorry."

She sighed in response, and finally decided to give in. "All right. Go down there. But make it quick. If you're gone for more than five minutes then you're in very serious trouble. Got it, mister?"

Simba saluted her. "Yes, ma'am. Don't worry about a thing. I'll be back before you even know it. Come on, Haiba."

Simba dropped down into the crevice, soon followed by Haiba.

Nala watched them disappear, and frowned. "You'd better be back," she said. "Or I'm going to kill you."

AN: Nala's become a bit of a scaredy-cat now, hasn't she? Oh, well. I can't really blame her. What do you think? I'm sure you lovely people will let me know. You're good at that kind of thing.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3: On the Other Side

AN: I love strange things. Don't you? All I write about is strange things. Think about it. Where else would you find a story with an evil Timon and Pumbaa, who want to drain the souls of innocent cubs? Strange, strange, strange. Well, it's time to meet some more strange people.

Kblade: Hago? Come back? *Again*? I believe you can only come back to life once, unless of course, Hago's boss decides to give him another chance...

kora22: Questioning plants is one of the most normal things Haiba can do. Wait till you see when he does something that's *not* normal...

Chapter Three: On the Other Side

"Yeah... this isn't exactly what I had in mind," said Haiba, as he looked around the cave he and Simba had ended up in. "I was expecting some kind of golden idol, or... Well, *something* interesting, at least." He turned to Simba, who was walking alongside him. "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"That it's really hot around here?" Simba answered, tugging at the fur on his neck. "Wow... it's like... being inside somebody's mouth."

"Simba, who would have a mouth this big?" Haiba asked. "A giant... snake monster or something?" He narrowed his eyes. "Actually, that would be pretty cool. Come to think of it, I'm *hoping* for a giant snake monster."

"You're crazy," replied Simba, focusing on what lay ahead of him. He sniffed the air. "Smells kind of warm, too."

Haiba stared at him, his eyes wide. "How can you *smell* warmth?" he wondered. "That makes no sense, Simba. I think the heat is getting to you. You're going crazy. Maybe you should go back up and look after Nala, while I explore this place."

Simba rolled his eyes and scoffed. "Yeah, right," he said. "I'm not going to miss whatever's at the end of this cave. It could be anything – or *anyone*." He had an exciting glint in his auburn eyes. "Maybe a genie. I've never met a genie before – but I *want* to. Don't you want to meet a genie, Haiba?"

"What would you need a genie for, Simba?" Haiba questioned. "Haven't you got enough, being the Prince of the Pride Lands and all? Or do you want more? Prince of the *World*, perhaps?" he joked with a smile.

"I wouldn't use a genie for myself," Simba told him. "I'd use it to help other people. For a start, I'd make Nala a bit happier than she is right now. You saw her – she was too scared to even come down here. For Nala, *that's* strange."

"Well, Hago did mess with her mind," said Haiba. "He messed with her mind a *lot*. I think being scared of dark places is normal after psychological torture. Not to mention a desperate need to be around people."

"And how would you know?" Simba asked, surprised by Haiba's extensive knowledge. For a weird guy, he sure knew a lot. He wasn't stupid. That was for certain.

"Blame Mom," replied Haiba. "She taught me a lot about war and fighting and torture and blood and guts and—"

"Lots of other horrible things involving pain and suffering," Simba finished for him. "Can we talk about something happy for once? Like... rainbows and stuff?"

"Rainbows – very colourful. They show up after it rains," said Haiba. "There. I talked about rainbows. By the way, did I tell you about the Grand Lands Neck Snap? You can actually twist a grown lion's head off, and the blood goes *everywhere*! Ha-ha! Isn't that great?"

Simba gave him an odd look. "Not really," he replied, before reaching a dead end in the tunnel they were walking through. "Hey! What the...?" Simba hit the wall with his paw, but then grunted in pain. "Ow!" he cried, rubbing his aching paw. "That hurt! This wall is *really* tough..."

"Well, when a cub tries to beat a wall, the wall normally wins," Haiba told him, as he strode over to the wall, putting his ear up to it. "Hmm..." He narrowed his eyes in concentration, listening hard. "I think I can hear something on the other side."

"Like what?" Simba asked.

"I don't know," Haiba replied, before head-butting the wall as hard as he could. *Smack!* "Well..." said Haiba as he stood back, not having felt a thing. "That wall is too thick for us to break through. It's a complete dead end. But there is *definitely* something on the other end of it. Something *evil*..."

"Really?" Simba's eyes widened. "But how does hitting your head against the wall tell you that?" he wondered.

"Oh, it's quite an interesting trick," replied Haiba. "That is, if you know how to do it properly."

"Hmm..." Simba narrowed his eyes. "Let me try."

"Uh, Simba—" Haiba began, but it was too late.

Simba banged his head on the rock. *Smack!* "Okay..." Simba said, as he stumbled backwards, his eyes wide. "I don't think I know how to do it properly." He fell onto his back, moaning in pain. "Oh..."

"I did warn you," Haiba told him. "Now can we get on with finding out what's on the other side of this wall?"

"But..." Simba wearily got to his paws, touching his throbbing forehead. He could feel a painful lump there. "You said we can't break through it. What are we supposed to do?"

"Well..." Haiba stared patting the ground. "There must be some kind of hole or entrance or *something* we can use to get through. So far, the way we came through looks like the only way to get in. Which means there must be a way to get through to the other side. Am I right?"

"I... guess..." Simba replied, looking down at the ground. "But everything below looks pretty strong to me. Maybe we're just hearing things?"

"No way," replied Haiba. "We're too smart to just hear things." Haiba's eyes scanned his surroundings, and his eyes lit up when he spotted a small tunnel in the corner of the wall. "Simba – look!"

"What is it?" Simba followed Haiba's gaze, and smiled when he saw the tiny tunnel. "Oh."

"Yes!" Haiba exclaimed, heading over to the tunnel. "It's just about big enough for us to get through."

"Good." Simba joined Haiba by his side.

"Okay, so here's the plan," Haiba began. "I'll go in first, taking an offensive position, ready to take out any hostile forces on the other side. Simba, you'll follow me in, taking a *defensive* position, covering me if necessary."

Simba stared at him. "Excuse me – who's in charge here?"

Haiba's face fell. "Sorry. Awaiting orders, sir."

Simba grinned. "Right, then. Here's the plan." There was a moment of silence, before he turned to Haiba. "Like you said, nice plan."

Haiba grinned back at him, before crawling in through the tunnel. "Well, it all looks the same at the end – from what I can see, anyway."

"Just keep going," Simba urged, following him. "I don't want to spend more than five minutes looking at your butt. I knew I should have gone first..."

"Ah, shut up." Haiba reached the end of the tunnel, and crawled out into a large cavern. "Whoa..." Haiba's eyes widened in surprise at what he saw.

Simba joined Haiba by his side. His eyes widened in horror, and he screamed. "*Demons! Nala was right! They're gonna kill us!*"

Chapter 4: Chapter 4: Wild Mambo Beasts

Chapter Four: Wild Mambo Beasts

"Demons?" Haiba raised an eyebrow at Simba. "You think *these* are demons? They're not *that* bad."

Simba and Haiba were staring at a group of small, cute little creatures. They looked like furballs with big, bright eyes, and had two feet. There were five of them. "What are they?" Simba asked, sounding disgusted.

He had seen a lot of things in his life – murderers, crazies, psychologically disturbed cubs – but most of them all looked the same. It was either a lion or a cub he had to fight. But for the first time, he found himself looking at something that was completely new to him. What kind of creatures were these?

"I recognise them," Haiba replied, his voice low and grave. "Those are wild Mambo beasts."

"Wild Mambo beats?" Simba's eyes widened slightly. "You talked about them before," he remembered. "You said they were really cute or something."

"Yeah." Haiba nodded. "Cute – but deadly."

The little creatures looked up at Simba and Haiba, before backing away slowly, cowering and whimpering in fear.

Simba couldn't help but feel a pang of guilt. "Aw..." he said, viewing the Mambo beats with sympathy. "I guess they are kind of cute..."

Haiba slapped Simba on the face, pulling him round so he was staring into Simba's eyes. "Simba, get a hold of yourself! Don't go saying things like that! That's how they work – they catch your attention with their cuteness. Their hypnotic effect is strong..."

Simba chuckled. "Don't worry about it," he said. "I'm not gonna get suckered in by the. Besides, what's the big deal?" He shrugged. "All I said was that they were cute. Is that really such a *huge* cause for concern? There are more important things, like... rainbows and stuff."

"What is it with you and rainbows today?" Haiba asked, narrowing his eyes. He shook his head. "Never mind. Look, we've got to kill these things before they cause any more trouble." He smiled. "I've always wanted to step on someone before." He raised a paw, ready to crush the Mambo beasts.

The whimpers of the tiny creatures became even louder, and they backed up against the cave wall in fear, afraid that Haiba was going to squash them all to death.

Simba pushed Haiba's paw back down to the ground. "Hold it, Haiba," he said. "You can't just *kill* them," he told him, giving Haiba a disapproving stare. "That's way too mean!"

"You've gotta be kidding me!" Haiba retorted, his eyes wide. "They're wild Mambo beasts! They're vicious killers with a hunger for the fleshy... flesh of cubs like us. That 'cute' thing is just an act! We must destroy them before it's too late!"

"No," Simba told him firmly. "I'm not going to let you kill them. It's wrong. We're not murderers."

"Simba, they'll kill us as soon as they get the chance," Haiba said urgently, desperate to get rid of the Mambo beasts as soon as possible – before they could cause the harm that he knew they would. "Already they've drawn you in. You've got to fight it. I know they look very cute, but it's just them trying to trick you."

Simba shook his head. "No way." He walked over to one of the creatures, and picked it up, cradling it gently in his paws. "How could something so soft and cuddly be a cruel, vicious killer?" He nuzzled its face. "It's okay, little guy... It's okay..."

"Simba, no!" Haiba cried, his body tensing up. He feared things were about to get ugly... "Don't pick it up! No touchy! Don't even *look* at it! Just put it down, and slowly back away, Simba."

"Haiba, maybe you're just getting mixed up with some other creatures," Simba said, as the other Mambo beasts began to surround him, all wanting a cuddle. "These guys seem really nice."

"Exactly!" Haiba exclaimed. "They *seem* nice, but really they're mean! *Really* mean! I'm warning you, Simba – make friends with those... *things*, and you'll be putting the whole pride in danger! The whole *world*!"

"Don't be stupid," replied Simba, before looking down at the cute little creature he held in his paws. "Don't listen to him,

little guy..." he told the thing, rocking it gently back and forth, like a baby. "I'll look after you," he promised, before looking at all the other creatures. "I'll look after *all* of you."

"I can't believe I'm hearing this," said Haiba, putting a paw to his temple, shaking his head. "We should have never come down here. This never would've happened. Stupid plants hiding holes in the ground. I bet this is a trap they sent for me! I hate devious flora..."

"I've got no idea what you're talking about," Simba said, as all the creatures nuzzled him. "I think I'll give one of these guys to Nala. I think they'll really cheer her up! She might go back to her good old self!"

"You can't!" Haiba argued. "If you bring at least *one* of those creatures up to the surface, then they'll kill everything in sight! All it takes is for you to turn your back, and... *bam!* They're chewing on your throat!"

Simba laughed in response. "Very funny, Haiba. But I just can't believe you. It's just that..." He held one of the creatures up to his face, staring into its huge eyes. "You stare into their eyes and..." Simba's eyes grew a little wider, and his mouth began to wobble. "They're just so cute!"

"Don't look into their eyes!" Haiba cried. "They'll just make you want them even more! They're using you so you can help them to escape!"

Simba stood up, as the five Mambo beasts crawled onto his back, nibbling on him with their small teeth playfully. "Come on," he said to them. "Let's get out of here. I'm going to show you all to your new home!"

"New home?" Haiba looked absolutely horrified. "You can't be serious! This is a joke, right? *Please* tell me it's a joke, Simba! Bringing those creatures into the Pride Lands is the same as jumping from the edge of a cliff! It's suicide! They'll kill all of us!"

"Don't insult my friends!" Simba snapped angrily.

"They're not your friends!" said Haiba. "You've barely known them five minutes! They're controlling you already! It'll only be a matter of time before they have the whole pride under their spell."

Simba strode over to the tunnel, the five creatures on his back. "Are you coming, Haiba? Or do you feel so strongly about my newfound friends that you're going to stay here for the rest of your life?"

Haiba sighed, and followed Simba. "All right, all right," he said. "I'm coming." He felt his stomach knotting up in fear. *What am I going to do?* he asked himself. *By the next morning we'll all be dead.*

Simba ducked low, making his way through the small tunnel. "I can't wait to show you the kingdom," he told his new 'friends'. "It's really neat! And wait until you meet Nala! She's just gonna *love* ya!"

That's what I'm afraid of, Haiba thought worriedly.

AN: Cute? Evil? I don't know! Simba seems really attached to those Mambo beasts, doesn't he? But I'm sure Nala won't be suckered in by their undeniable cuteness. It's not like she *adores* all things cute or anything...

Chapter 5: Chapter 5: Nala's Present

AN: Are the wild Mambo beasts really as bad as Haiba claims they are? Well, if you're a fan of my stories, than I presume you know the answer. But first, I need to answer a couple of reviews.

StonedMonkey1: Well, it has been a few days since the events of *The Return of Hago*. Simba's stab wound just wasn't that deep, so it's healed up by now. And thanks for the compliments, too! I just love being told I'm a good writer! You've made my day!

626and624: Ah, yes, the Giggleepies. I remember them well. But the Mambo beasts were sort of inspired by the ProtoPET from *Ratchet & Clank 2*. Cute, but oh so deadly.

Now go on, get on with it! I don't pay you to just sit there! Actually, come to think of it, I don't pay you at all... Oops.

Chapter Five: Nala's Present

Nala felt so confused.

Ever since the events of the other day, Nala felt lost. So lost. She was right where she wanted to be – in the Pride Lands, her *true* home – but she still felt lost. There was something missing. Something important was absent from her life.

A *good* father.

It turned out that Hago – Simba and Nala's greatest and most evil foe – was Nala's father. She was originally under the assumption that a lion called Muerto was her father, but this sadly wasn't true. Hago had used his magical powers to manipulate her mother's mind, erasing all traces of him and making her *think* that someone called Muerto was her father. But Muerto wasn't even a real name. It just meant 'dead'. How apt.

Because her *real* father was no longer in the world of the living. He'd already been killed once before, and Nala hoped that this time he was gone for good. She didn't care. He deserved to die. He deserved to suffer and writhe in agony as his life was slowly taken from him.

But the one thing that made his death a little less satisfying was the fact that Nala was the one who murdered him. She'd driven his magical staff straight through his chest, killing him instantly. It was all over in just a matter of seconds.

However, even though Hago was gone, the circumstances surrounding his death still plagued Nala's mind. She'd killed him. In cold blood, she had murdered her own father. She didn't care one bit. She *wanted* it. He had tortured her horribly. Made her feel like life wasn't worth living. Every part of her body thought that this was all he deserved – to suffer in the darkness of death for ever and ever.

But she wasn't a killer. That fact was plain and simple. She'd never killed someone before in her life. She didn't even step on ants on the ground. She was completely against murder.

So why had she done it? Because she was insane? Because she just wanted it at the time? Many questions were in her head, but the most important of them all was this:

Was it because parts of her father's personality still remained in her soul?

That was the most horrible part. Wondering if parts of her father still lived on in her. Was she supposed to grow up to be an evil, horrible maniac – just like Hago? Was that her true destiny in life? Would she even be able to stop it?

The amount of questions in her mind were endless. Infinite. And one of the worst parts was that there were no answers. She couldn't even ask her father, because he was dead. But then again, even if Hago was still alive then Nala didn't think he would tell her anything. One of the many 'quirks' of his psychopathic personality was a total devotion to secrecy. He would only ever tell you something if it resulted in a good deal of pain. He was just horrible. Plain and simple.

However, she didn't *feel* evil. Her personality was still the same – more or less. She still felt a little confused and dazed after the brutal, unforgiving torture she had received, but she was definitely recovering. Within a few days, she would be right back to normal.

That's what she hoped, at least. Even though she never wanted to think about what Hago had done to her ever again, she still wondered if Hago had done something magical to her. Maybe something that would make her like him. She feared that one morning she would wake up, wanting to kill everyone she loved. It wasn't beyond Hago. It was normal for

him.

But Nala hoped that wasn't the case. The torture was bad enough. She didn't want to end up like her father. In fact, when she grew up, she was going to be the complete opposite of him. If she ever had a cub of her own, then she was going to look after it until the day she died. She wouldn't abandon it like Hago had. She would love her child for ever.

Nala wished she had a different father. The thought of him being dead was quite sad, but it was better than knowing that her father was a deranged psychopathic killer. But if she had a *real* father – a good, kind father – then she would be so happy.

She already had a good family, she knew that. She had her mother, Sarafina. Simba was a very loving boyfriend. Haiba was sort of like her strange brother. The only thing missing was a father...

Nala opened her eyes, and looked around, blinking a couple of times. "Whoa..." she said, rubbing her eyes. "I guess I must have fallen asleep," she said, yawning as she got to her paws. Looking left and right, she soon realised that Simba and Haiba weren't back yet. She sighed. "Where have those two got to?"

"We're here!" Simba announced from inside the crevice, sounding rather happy and cheerful. His head popped up, and he had a big grin on his face. "And I've got something I think you're gonna like!"

Nala couldn't help but smile. Just the sight of him made her happy. She was very lucky to know a cub like him. "Really?" she asked, her smile turning into a grin. "What is it, Simba?"

"Don't listen to him, Nala!" Haiba cried from inside the cave. "Whatever you do, just don't look into their eyes!"

"Whose eyes?" Nala asked, a confused look appearing on her face. "Haiba, where are you?"

And that's when Nala saw them. The five blue creatures popping out of the whole. Five round little blue balls of fur with big, innocent eyes and two feet. "What. The. *Heck?*" she exclaimed, her eyes widening at this very odd and weird sight. "Simba, what are those... *things?*"

Haiba got out from the crevice, and opened his mouth to speak. "They're—"

Simba covered his mouth with a paw, and all that could be heard from Haiba was muffled speech that made no sense. "Cute little guys, aren't they?" Simba asked, ignoring Haiba, staring down at the tiny little creatures. "We – well, I – discovered them in the cave. I guess that means I get to name them!"

Simba removed his paw from Haiba's mouth. "... Covered in mud," he finished, earning a surprised reaction from both Simba and Nala. "And that's my theory on the meaning of life. Any questions?"

"Haiba, you're a weird guy," Nala began. "Have you seen anything like these ugly little things before?"

"*Ugly?*" Simba exclaimed in surprise, his eyes widening. "I think they're pretty cute."

"Of course I know what they are, Nala," replied Haiba. "They're wild Mambo beasts. They trick you into believing they're all cute and friendly, but really it's just an act so they can tear you apart as soon as your back is turned. Vicious little things. I told you about them before."

"Really?" Nala looked pretty shocked. "Wow. I'm lucky you told me, otherwise I probably would have..." Nala stared at one of the little Mambo beasts. "Wait a minute..."

She looked entranced by that one particular creature, and walked towards it. "Wow..." She picked the creature up, and it mewled in response, nuzzling her chest. "Aw..." she said, suddenly warming to the fuzzy little guy. "I guess it is kind of cute..."

Haiba gritted his teeth, worried instantly. *Oh, Nala*, he thought. *Not you, too*. "Nala, don't..." he said, although he knew it was pretty pointless.

She stared into the creature's big eyes, and her own eyes widened in response. "So... cute..." she said, enticed by how adorable the tiny thing was. She hugged it close to her chest, rocking it back and forth. "I just *love* it! This was a really nice present, Simba! Thank you! It's really cheered me up!"

"I knew you'd like it," said Simba, smiling as he watched her cuddle with the creature. "I mean, if I find it cute, then you'd have to find it cute, too, right?"

"How many of these guys are there?" Nala asked, looking left and right. She began to count them all. "One, two, three, four..." She looked down at the one in her paws. "And this little guy makes five. It's like having my own little baby..."

"Oh, don't start that again," Haiba muttered, rolling his eyes. "You tried that with Frank – and he ended up dead, remember?"

"Are you insulting my parenting skills?" Nala snapped, glaring at him angrily.

"I know, right?" Simba stared at Haiba. "He's been acting like this ever since I found those cute little creatures! I think he's just jealous that I discovered them and he didn't."

"You didn't discover them!" Haiba yelled. "They've existed for thousands and thousands of years!"

"How would you know that? Are you thousands of years old or something?" Simba teased with a chuckle.

Haiba's face fell flat, and he shook his head. "I am so regretting going into that cave right now..."

Chapter 6: Chapter 6: Biggest Stomachs Ever

Chapter Six: Biggest Stomachs Ever

"So..." said Haiba, as he, Simba and Nala sat beside the water hole. "This is a barrel of laughs."

The wild Mambo beasts surrounded the three, mostly concentrating on getting a hug from Simba and Nala. They seemed to be so dependent on love and care from their new 'owners'. It was as if the strange, odd little creatures were *obsessed* with them... "Aw, Simba, look at them!" Nala exclaimed, pointing to the creatures. "They really like us!"

"So you still think these... *monsters* are cute?" Haiba asked, looking down at the Mambo beasts with utter disgust. They weren't fooling him. They were killers, and would stop at nothing to gobble Simba and Nala up for their dinner! He knew he had to stop them before it was all too late... "Because I don't. Do you know why? 'Cause they're evil demons!"

"Haiba, did you hit your head or something?" was Nala's reply. "There's nothing wrong with them. They just... like a little bit of attention, that's all. Just look at those eyes." She viewed the creatures with sympathy. "They're so vulnerable and lonely. It's good that Simba rescued them in time, otherwise they might have starved to death!"

"They've been down there for years!" Haiba argued. "They have the biggest stomachs this side of the world! It may not look like it, but it's true! Truer than the truest thing that's ever been said! They eat whole prides, and then retreat back into their caves, waiting for the next unfortunate lion to come along and 'rescue' them!"

Simba stared at him. "Haiba, could you and I have a little chat behind that tree over there?" he asked, pointing to a tree a few feet away from the edge of the water hole. The tree that Simba and Nala had first met by.

Haiba narrowed his eyes, a little suspicious. "Okay..." he agreed. *What now? Are those Mambo beasts controlling his mind? Will he rip off my head as soon as we're both behind that tree?*

Simba smiled in response. "Good," he said, standing up. "Back in a minute, Nala," he told her, before heading towards the tree.

Haiba followed him. "What's the big deal?" Nala asked, watching as he walked away.

Haiba shrugged in response. "I don't know. Maybe he's finally seen some sense," he responded, before heading after Simba.

Arriving at the tree, Haiba was already arguing against Simba. "Okay, Simba, before you say a thing I need to tell you that —"

"Shh!" Simba hissed, pulling Haiba behind the tree, speaking in a conspiratorial whisper. "Get behind here!"

"Whoa!" Haiba exclaimed as Simba pulled him behind the tree. "Where's the fire?"

"What fire?" Simba looked confused. "Never mind. Look, you have to be quiet. Otherwise..." Simba shot a glance at Nala, who was busy playing with the Mambo beasts. "They might hear us."

Haiba looked a little bewildered. "Simba, you're talking like you're on my side—"

"I *am*," Simba told him, his eyes widening. "Of course I am, I knew those things were trouble right from the start."

"But... but you seemed so... so into them!" Haiba was unable to believe he was hearing this. Just a minute ago Simba was praising and hugging the creatures like they were his own son! "It doesn't make any sense! *You* don't make any sense!"

"Can you be quiet for just a minute?" Simba sighed.

"Sorry."

"Good." Simba's eyes darted left and right, making sure no one was looking, and then he began to speak. "You see, I've met these kind of creatures before," he revealed, much to Haiba's surprise.

"You've met them *before*?" Haiba exclaimed, his eyes widening in shock. "But you acted like you'd never seen them—"

"Exactly," Simba interrupted. "I was *acting*." He grinned. "I'm pretty good at that, huh?"

"But how could you have met them before?" Haiba asked, still a little confused. "Where? When? How? And will I ever stop asking one-word questions?"

"I found them in this cave a while back – before me and Nala were even together – and there were about ten or eleven of them!" he explained. "That's way more than what we found a few hours ago!"

"But... why didn't you tell me? Why the heck did you even take them with you?" Haiba still didn't understand. Simba had most likely put the whole pride at risk! Because of him, they could all end up dead, eaten alive by the wild Mambo beasts!

"You're still not letting me speak," Simba told him. "In order for me to tell you, I have to *speak*. That's how it works, Haiba. Now, before you rudely interrupted me, I was going to say that I managed to destroy the creatures."

"Well, where was Nala?" said Haiba.

"It was in the jungle," Simba replied. "Me and Nala split up. I went one way and she went the other. She was lucky, otherwise they might have eaten her."

"You do realise that there's five of them around her right now, don't you?" said Haiba, an eyebrow raised. "That renders your previous actions pretty pointless."

"Shut up," was Simba's reply. "They're easy to defeat, anyway."

"Yeah, squash 'em," Haiba said. "All it takes is jumping up and down on them with your paws a couple of times. Easy."

"Yeah – until they get out the sharp teeth," Simba responded. "They bite hard, and I mean *hard*. They almost tore off my ear!"

"All right, so how did you beat them?" Haiba asked. "Talk them out of it nicely or something?"

"Only you could do that, Haiba," Simba said. "You talk more than anyone else in the world. Now, let me think..." Simba put a paw to his chin, a thoughtful look on his face. "How did I beat them? How did I beat them?" he wondered. "I can't remember quite well. Most of my thoughts at the time were about how beautiful Nala was. I had a big crush on her at the time, you know."

"Come on!" Haiba yelled. "You *must* remember! The future of the whole pride is at stake!"

"Okay, okay, don't rush me!" Simba thought for a moment. "Oh, I remember! You've got to..." Simba stuck his tongue out in disgust. "Oh, you're not gonna like this at all..."

"Why, what is it?" Haiba demanded. "You have to tell me! As in right now!" This was serious business! This was urgent! This was a matter of a life and death!

"You have to, um, kinda... kiss them," Simba explained. "As in... with your tongue. You sort of have to... shove it down their... throats."

Haiba shook his head. Simba was right – he didn't like this at all. "Oh, please tell me you're kidding," he pleaded. "*Please*."

"It kills them dead," Simba continued.

"How would you even know that?" Haiba asked, eyes wide.

"They bit my tongue," Simba replied, as if it was the most normal thing in the world. "I tried to shake them off, and well... You know..."

"You ended up giving it a very passionate kiss," Haiba concluded. "Well, you can do it. I'm not even *going* there. Not with a wild Mambo beast. Although it could work with *other* forms of life..."

"Come on." Simba motioned for Haiba to follow him, as he headed back towards the water hole where Nala was.

"You know, you'd better do this quickly or—" Haiba stopped dead when he saw what Nala was doing with the Mambo beasts. "No, Nala!" he cried, horrified. "*Don't put them in the water!*"

AN: Oh, no! Not the water! Anyone seen *Gremlins*? If you have, then I'm sure you know what water does to those cute little furballs...

Chapter 7: Chapter 7: Divide and Conquer

AN: I left you on a cliffhanger – I do that a lot. Sorry. Comes with the job. But you'll be happy to see everything resolved, won't you?

Kblade: What happens in *Gremlins*? Well, to make a long story short: small creatures wreak havoc across a small town. Pesky little things...

Reish95: I have a talent for fooling people. My doctor says that's a sign of having severe mental problems. Just kidding – I've fooled you again! Ha-ha!

Chapter Seven: Divide and Conquer

It was far too late for Simba and Haiba to do anything. The five wild Mambo beasts they had all found in the cave were now in the water, and it wasn't much longer before they did something very, very strange.

They started to shudder and shake rapidly, like they were having some kind of awful seizure. But the odd thing was that they didn't look like they were in any kind of pain at all. It was as if they had done it hundreds – *thousands* – of times before. Like it was completely in their nature.

"What's happening to them?" Nala asked, a worried look on her face. She didn't want her cuddly new friends to die! She was supposed to be their mother! "Simba, do something right now!"

To Nala's horror, Simba actually looked happy. "Hey, maybe this is a good thing," he suggested to Haiba, a smile on his face. "Maybe they're about to explode into a million pieces!"

"Simba, that's horrible!" Nala cried, ashamed of the way he was behaving. "You're supposed to be comforting me right now! They could be *dying*!"

"I'm afraid not, Simba," said Haiba, a solemn tone in his voice. "The nightmare's only just beginning," he revealed, earning a confused reaction from Simba. "Because when you put a wild Mambo beast in water, you've pretty much sealed your fate."

Inside the water, the Mambo beasts began to shake even more wildly around, screeching at the top of their high-pitched voices. They opened their mouths as wide as they possibly could, and the three cubs gasped at what they saw next.

Pop! More Mambo beasts began to pop out from the open mouths of the original creatures. Simba, Nala and Haiba were quick to realise that the Mambo beasts were multiplying.

Now there were ten of them. *Ten*. That was *double* the original amount – which Haiba knew could only mean double the trouble. The situation was getting much, much worse.

"Oh, no..." said Simba, equally horrified. "Now what are we gonna do?"

"Aw..." Nala stared at the ten tiny creatures crawling out of the water hole. "Now there's ten of them! Like a small little pride..." Any hope of Nala realising how dangerous these creatures were had been decimated. They had a complete hold over her mind. She was mesmerised by their unbelievable cuteness.

"Oh, that's just great," Haiba mumbled, backing away from the troublesome little things. "Simba, get your tongue ready. It's kissing time."

"What?" Simba's eyes widened, before he shook his head. "No way! I'm not kissing *that* many of them! You've gotta help me!"

"I'd have to be *crazy* to kiss a wild Mambo beast!" Haiba exclaimed. "Do you know what kind of diseases you can catch from them? They can make your ears drop off, or your legs disappear, and in one case I believe someone grew an extra head. But I'm not sure if that one's true or not."

"Diseases?" said Nala, before laughing in disbelief. "I don't think so," she said, picking up one of the Mambo beasts and stroking its furry little head. "They're very kind and affectionate. They wouldn't harm a fly."

"You're right," Haiba agreed, much to Simba's surprise. "They wouldn't harm a fly – they'd harm *more* than that! They kill and maim and bite you on the butt and just won't let go!"

"It's true, Nala," Simba told her. "I've seen them in action before – back when we were just friends – and they're more than mean! They're completely *evil*! They've brainwashed you into believing that they're cute! It's all one big trick! You've gotta believe me! You always said you trusted me – *didn't* you?"

Nala just glared at him, shocked at what had become of her future mate. She shook her head slowly, looking down at the ground. "I can't believe you, Simba," she said, disgusted with him. "I thought you were different from all the other cubs, but I can see that you're just as selfish. You don't need to be jealous just because I've found some new friends. Friends that are ten times better than you!"

"She's gone insane!" Simba cried, unable to believe what he was hearing. "Stupid Mambo beasts! I should have squished them when I had the chance!" he said, regretting ever laying eyes on them in that dark cave.

"Then why *didn't* you?" replied Haiba, still surprised at how Simba had brought them to the surface. "This would have been so much easier if you'd just let me crush them to death! Why'd you bring them up here?"

"Um... I don't know," Simba replied, scratching the back of his head, feeling rather confused. "Something inside me just... sort of made me bring them up. Something in my head."

"The mind control," Haiba muttered, rolling his eyes. "Typical. Stupid Mambo beasts..." he said through gritted teeth.

Simba shook his head. "No. It wasn't the Mambo beasts," he said. "It was something... else. Some other person – or *thing* – speaking to me. It was really weird..." He blinked a few times. "I don't know what got into me."

"Hmm..." Haiba didn't have time to ponder on that, because the Mambo beasts were making their way towards the water hole again. "Whoa, wait, wait, wait!" he yelled, running over to Nala. "Nala, keep them away from the water! You *have* to! It's important! Otherwise they're gonna spit out more and more of them and then—"

"Really?" Nala interrupted, a big, eager grin on her face. "Cool! I'd love to have more of these little guys running around! We could have hundreds of them! Thousands! *Millions*!"

"Oh, no, no, no," Haiba said. "We can't have more of them!" he told Nala, trying desperately to get through to her. "Nala, it's only a matter of time before they reach their hunger cycle!"

"Hunger cycle?" Simba didn't like the sound of that. "What's that mean, Haiba?" he asked, already worried.

"It's when they're ready to eat," Haiba explained. "To *feast* on us all. When they reach their hunger cycle, they become almost unstoppable. Come tonight, we'll just be bones lying on the ground!"

"What?" Simba nibbled on his claws, concerned. "But I don't want to be bones lying on the ground! I'm too young! I've got so much time and so little to do! Wait... Strike that, reverse it."

"Then we have to stop them," Haiba concluded, "before it's too late for all of us. Okay..." He thought for a moment. "Well, obviously we can't kiss them all – there's way too many of them for that. Right?"

Simba nodded in agreement. "Right."

"Good," said Haiba. "And, we can't squash them all, because as soon as we kill one, the rest will be on top of us before you can say, 'Three dead cubs lying on the ground.'"

Simba looked doubtful. "Three dead cubs lying on the—"

"Don't say that!" Haiba hissed. "You'll jinx us, and then we *will* end up dead! Now let's see... If I remember the history of the Mambo beasts correctly, then they seem to live best in sunlight, and dark places – like a cave. But... I believe that if you combine the two, then it might just destroy them for good."

"You mean dark mixed with light?" Simba presumed, starting to get an idea of what Haiba meant. "Like..." It took him a second to realise. "Moonlight?"

"Exactly!" replied Haiba with a grin, nodding. "Moonlight! It's dark at night, but the moon still provides illumination! Which may or may not – but I'm hoping it will – get rid of the annoying little termites for ever!"

Simba shot a look at the sun. It was slowly beginning to set. "Hmm..." Simba narrowed his eyes. "Looks like we have a little while before it's night, though. The sun is only just beginning to set."

"But we *can't* wait!" Haiba complained. "We haven't got long before the Mambo beasts reach their hunger cycle, and they

decide to tear into our soft flesh!"

"Stop worrying," said Simba. "Maybe they won't reach their hunger cycle for a few more *hours*. If they *had* by now, then don't you think we would have noticed?"

"Of course we would have noticed," Haiba told him. "First it would have started with a—"

Suddenly, the Mambo beasts were heard screeching again. Haiba's eyes widened in shock. "First it would have started with a... with a loud screech," he said, fearing the worst. "And then—"

The Mambo beasts began to shake a little, hopping from left to right on their tiny feet. "And then they start shaking a little," said Haiba, knowing what was coming next. "Then—"

The Mambo beasts opened their mouths, and long, sharp teeth appeared, looking strong enough to tear a grown lion's face off. "Then they grow long, sharp teeth," Haiba gulped, now seriously worried. "And finally—"

The Mambo beasts' eyes turned a dark shade of red. They looked possessed. Possessed by pure evil. "Their eyes turn red," Haiba finished, backing away slowly. "And there you have it," he said. "The Mambo beasts have entered their hunger cycle. Any questions?"

"No – but I have a suggestion," Simba replied. "*Run!*"

Haiba was quick to oblige, following Simba as he ran away from the water hole. But then, Simba remembered about Nala. "Wait!" he cried, turning around and heading back to where he came from. "We've gotta get Nala!"

Nala was staring at the Mambo beasts with utter disgust, finally realising what they were. "Oh... that's just... *disgusting*," she said, horrified.

Simba pulled her away. "Come on, Nala, this is no time for staring at them. They're gonna eat you!"

Nala nodded, following Simba as they ran away. Haiba was standing by a tree, waiting for them with an urgent expression on his face. He was very anxious to leave – and fast.

"Come on!" Haiba yelled as the two cubs arrived in front of him. "We've gotta get out of here before they—"

Haiba screamed as one of the creatures jumped on top of his head, and sunk his teeth into his skull. "Ow!" he cried out in pain, as the Mambo beast bore into him. He shook about wildly, trying to shake the thing off, but it wouldn't budge.

"No!" Simba raced over to Haiba and tried to pull the Mambo beast from his head, but it was stuck in there pretty tight. It wasn't going anywhere anytime soon. "It... it won't budge!"

"No!" Haiba growled through gritted teeth, determined. "Not. Today. You. Stupid. Ugly. *Things!*" he finished, digging his claws into the Mambo beast and ripping it from his head. He threw it high into the air as hard as he could, watching as it sailed off into the distance. He laughed triumphantly, hopping up and down in joy. "Take *that!*"

Blood dribbled from the wound on top of his head and down onto his face. Haiba wiped it away with his paw, leaving a faint red smear. "*Man*, that hurts!" he said, sucking air in through his teeth and trying to ignore the pain.

"Let's go," Simba urged, motioning for Nala and Haiba to follow. "Before any more of them decide to show their ugly—"

A Mambo beast jumped at Simba, and ended up biting down on his paw. "Ouch!" he howled, shaking his paw around the place, desperate to get rid of it before it chewed off his whole leg. "Ow, ow... ow, ow, ow! Ooh, ooh, itches, itches!" Using his other paw, he dug his claws into the Mambo beast's head, wrenching it away from his paw and throwing it to the ground, where it rolled away, screaming.

Looking down, Simba found a little cut on his paw, blood slowly oozing from it. He licked some of it up. "Oh, that stings," he winced, shaking his paw to try and take the pain away. But that just seemed to make it hurt even more, much to his annoyance.

"Before anyone says anything else, I'm going," said Nala, before she ran off. It didn't take long before Simba and Haiba followed her.

"Hey, wait for us!" Simba called after her. "You can't just leave us like this! *You're* the one who was brainwashed by those stupid little things!"

Nala rolled her eyes. "Just hurry it up, Simba. We haven't got time for this."

"I hate to say it, but she's right," Haiba agreed. "We need to hide from the Mambo beasts. We're easy targets out in the open. If we can find some shelter then we should be safe until it turns dark."

"What happens when it turns dark?" Nala asked.

"I'm assuming that the Mambo beasts will be unable to handle the mixture of light and darkness," Haiba explained. "They can live in one or the other, but not both at the same time."

"But it looks like it'll be a while away before it's night," Nala pointed out, looking up at the sky. Sundown had barely begun. "What if the Mambo beasts decide on finding everyone at Pride Rock? They could eat everyone we know!"

"Um..." Haiba had a worried look on his face, as he looked back. "Somehow, I don't think so..."

Simba and Nala turned around to see that the Mambo beasts were following them, hopping across the ground, trying to catch up. To the cubs' surprise, they weren't that far away. "Oh, come on!" Simba yelled. "Give us a break!"

"Just keep running!" Haiba instructed, breaking into a sprint again. He rolled down a small hill, and kept on running. "If you stop, then they'll tear you apart!"

"You don't need to tell me!" replied Simba, as he increased his speed. A grin spread across his face when he noticed a cave in the distance. "Look! That cave! Let's hide in there!" he suggested.

The three cubs arrived at the cave. Simba and Haiba tried to get through the entrance at the same time, and ended up getting stuck.

"Get in!" Nala shouted, pushing them inside the cave, before entering herself.

Looking inside, there wasn't all that much to see. Just a few rocks and a small hole in the ceiling, allowing a thick beam of sunlight to shine down into the cave, creating a medium-sized circle on the ground.

Simba poked his head outside, and gulped nervously. "They're still coming towards us," he reported, sounding scared. "Do you think they'll spot us in here?"

"I don't know," Haiba replied uncertainly. "But it's definitely better than being stuck out in the open."

Simba's eyes widened in horror. "Oh, no..." he gasped, before turning around. "Get back!" he commanded to Nala and Haiba. "They're coming! Get back against the wall!"

Haiba and Nala were quick to obey, pressing their backs against the far wall of the cave. Staring out of the entrance, they could see the wild Mambo beasts getting closer and closer, ready to eat them all.

Simba joined them. "What do we do?" Nala asked, a terrified expression on her face. "We're going to die, aren't we?"

"Um... there's always a ray of sunshine in the darkness?" Haiba said half-heartedly with a shrug. "My mother taught me that phrase." He saw the looks Simba and Nala were giving him, and then frowned. "Sorry. I say stupid things when I'm nervous."

The Mambo beasts arrived at the cave opening, growling, angry at their dinner for escaping.

"They can smell our blood," said Haiba. "That just makes them even angrier. And more vicious."

"I love you, Simba," Nala told him. "And Haiba... Well, I like you."

Haiba glared at her. "Gee, thanks. I'm just about to be eaten alive and all I get is a 'like'?" He shook his head. "There's no justice, is there? Can I at least have a last kiss?"

"No, Haiba."

"Last hug?"

"No."

"Last poke?"

"No!"

"This day just keeps getting worse."

The ten Mambo beasts slowly made their way towards Simba, Nala and Haiba. There was no way their meal was escaping now. In just a matter of seconds, the three of them would all be eaten alive.

Simba, Nala and Haiba all closed their eyes, awaiting their grisly fate.

The wild Mambo beasts made their way across the circle of sunlight on the ground.

And all of a sudden, they stopped dead.

They looked upwards at the sunlight which shone down on them, and then they started to scream. They wailed in pain at the top of their tiny little voices!

The three cubs opened their eyes, and were surprised to see the ten Mambo beasts all writhing around in agony in the sunlight.

And one by one, they began to explode.

Poof! One exploded into nothingness. *Poof!* Then another. *Poof!* Then another!

In just a few seconds, the wild Mambo beasts were no more.

"Oh." Simba sounded shocked, as he took a few steps forward. He patted the circle of sunlight on the ground with his paw. "They're all gone."

"But..." Nala was just as shocked. "But how?"

"Hmm..." Haiba narrowed his eyes in thought. "Well, I think I've come up with an answer for that."

"What?" Simba and Nala wanted to know.

"Well, look." Haiba pointed up at the hole in the ceiling, which allowed the sunlight to shine in. "It's light out there, yes?"

Simba and Nala looked at each other and nodded. "Yeah."

"Yeah, and it's dark in here," Haiba pointed out. "We mixed dark with light, thus destroying the wild Mambo beasts." He grinned. "That's brilliant! Looks like my mother was right: there's always a ray of sunshine in the darkness."

"What do you know," said Simba, impressed. "You were right, Haiba."

"I'm *always* right," Haiba stated with a smile.

Nala giggled. "Don't get too carried away."

"Sleep..." Simba said in a zombie-like tone that night, as he lay on his back. "Need... sleep..."

Nala snuggled up to him. "You're really that tired, huh?"

Simba nodded at her. "Yep. For the past few nights I've been sleeping like a baby. No nightmares at all. Things are getting better and better!"

He noticed the sad look on Nala's face. "Wish I could say the same," she mumbled.

Simba hugged her. "Come on, Nala. Don't let it get to you. You'll be all right in the end. And if you have a bad dream, then you know I'm right next to you," he told her. "You know me: never too busy for a hug."

She giggled, giving him a quick lick on the cheek. "Thanks, Simba," she told him. "I feel better already."

"Great!" Simba exclaimed, grinning. "Now I can't wait until tomorrow morning! I bet it's gonna be even *more* dangerous than today!" He laughed. "You never know *what* I'll find myself up against!"

Unfortunately for Simba, when he woke up the following morning he would find himself up against his own friends...

The End

AN: And the Mambo beasts are no more. Still, it looks like Simba is in heaps of trouble tomorrow. You love a good romance, don't you? Well...

NEXT TIME: Nala and Haiba are best friends, and they both have crushes on each other. Simba is just Nala's friend, lonely pining for her affection. Can he win her over?